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CONGRESSMAN ROB SIMMONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SECOND DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

February 4, 2004

The Honorable Richard Pombo, Chairman
House Committee on Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Pombo:

Richard:

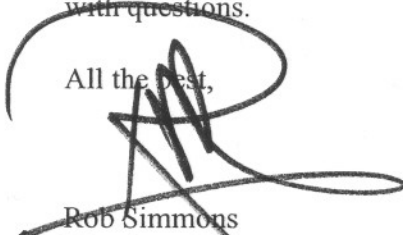
It has come to my attention that your committee will be holding a hearing on February 26th on the issue of tribal acknowledgement.

As you may know, the state of Connecticut has been at the forefront of tribal recognition reform. In fact, just last week the Bureau of Indian Affairs reversed their previous preliminary decision and granted federal recognition to Connecticut's Schaghticoke tribe. This decision will have an enormous impact on the state of Connecticut and the entire Northeast as it sets the stage for a third Connecticut casino and the first within an hour's drive of New York City in western Connecticut. I have attached a recent news article for your review.

Having worked on these matters as both a Congressman and State Representative, I believe that the challenges that we face with regard to tribal issues in the Northeast are unique. Having said this, there are many individuals in my district and state who may be able to offer insights from this perspective. In light of last week's decision by the BIA, I ask that you consider testimony at your hearing from one of these individuals

I would be happy to work with you and your staff if you are interested in having somebody from Connecticut come to the hearing. Feel free to contact me or Jonathan Martin of my staff at 5-2076 with questions.

All the best,


Rob Simmons
Member of Congress
Second District, Connecticut



<http://www.ctnow.com/news/local/statewire/hc-30190450.apds.m0330.bc-ct--tribjan30,0,4472366.story>

Latest Indian decision worries Connecticut

By JOHN CHRISTOFFERSEN
Associated Press Writer

January 30 2004

The federal government's decision to recognize the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation as a fourth Indian tribe in Connecticut has some worried the state may change into a gambling mecca in the Northeast and lose its cherished tradition of local control.

"It would just change our town entirely," said Dolores Schiesel, the first selectman of Kent, a bucolic town of 3,000 where the tribe has its reservation. "We feel it's changing the face of Connecticut dramatically. All of a sudden we're a state where our whole economy is premised on gambling."

Federal recognition gives the Schaghticoke the right to negotiate a gaming compact with the state, and the tribe has expressed interest in developing a casino in western Connecticut.

Three southeastern Connecticut tribes have federal recognition. Two of them, the Mashantucket Pequots and the Mohegans, own very successful casinos. The third, the Eastern Pequots, received recognition in June 2002; the state is appealing that decision and plans to appeal the Schaghticoke ruling.

Jeff Benedict, president of the Connecticut Alliance Against Casino Expansion and author of a book critical of the Pequots, said his group is planning a series of forums in Fairfield County to fight the possible casinos. Benedict said gambling creates a host of problems, including addictions, more crime and traffic.

If more casinos are built in Connecticut, he said, "I think this state becomes Las Vegas East. This is the place you go to gamble east of the Mississippi. That's a course of self-destruction."

But others note that the two tribal casinos, the Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Resort Casino, have poured billions of dollars into the state's treasury and created thousands of jobs at a time when southeastern Connecticut badly needed them.

Schaghticoke Chief Richard Velky said a casino could generate thousands of jobs and economically boost an urban area depressed by loss of factories and state neglect.

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, who has opposed recognition for the Schaghticoke and other

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tribes, agreed that the existing casinos have generated substantial jobs and taxes.

He contends, however, that the Schaghticokes did not meet the government's criteria for recognition.

"Federal recognition of a tribe has profound and far-reaching ramifications," Blumenthal said.

Marc Ryan, Gov. John G. Rowland's budget director, said one of those ramifications could be the loss of revenues from the state's two existing casinos. That is because the state would have to reopen its current gaming compact with the Mashantucket Pequots and Mohegans, which guarantees Connecticut 25 percent of all slot machine revenue.

"They may try to negotiate down the percentage," he said.

Blumenthal said the state's appeal and other issues will likely take years to resolve and delay any new casinos.

Last January the legislature repealed the state's Las Vegas Nights law, which was used by the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan tribes to open their casinos. Supporters of the repeal said eliminating the law could block attempts to build a third gambling facility.

Rowland said he thought the law would hold up if appealed.

"We do have the rights to set our own laws and regulations here in the state of Connecticut," Rowland said.

With federal recognition, the Schaghticokes will seek to expand their 400-acre reservation by annexing 2,200 adjacent acres.

Velky has said the additional land is not meant for a casino, but would allow 315 tribal members who are scattered across Connecticut to finally assemble in one place.

"We will gather when we please in our sovereign land," he said.

Connecticut has a strong tradition of home rule, with no county government. Tribal recognition creates entities not subject to local taxation, zoning and other regulations.

The BIA decision recognizing the Schaghticokes has buoyed the hopes of other tribes seeking recognition. Golden Hill Paugussett Chief Quiet Hawk said Friday he is more confident his tribe will be successful after the decision on the Schaghticokes.

The Paugussetts want to open a casino in Bridgeport, which has expressed interest in a casino as a way to bolster its economy.

Two bands of Nipmuc Indians from Massachusetts - the Chaubaunagungamaug and Hassanamisco - are expecting a decision on recognition in April. The groups were rejected in a preliminary decision, but have submitted additional information.

Gov. John G. Rowland again on Friday promised to work with Blumenthal to "do all we can" to appeal the decision.

"It is going to be difficult for them in the short term to bring a casino to the state of Connecticut," he

said.

Associated Press writers Noreen Gillespie, Susan Haigh and Donna Tommelleo contributed to this report.

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